

Theatre for thought at Solihull staff development day

Solihull Probation held a development day on 13 November, when staff considered the 'Toxic Trio': domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health, which are common factors in child deaths.

Over 80 people attended the event, which also included staff from local police, housing agencies, peer mentor organisations, drug treatment agencies and mental health services.

Head of Solihull Probation, Paul Levy, opened the day with some statistics:

- Domestic violence accounts for 30% of violent crime in Solihull;
- Alcohol is a factor in a third of child abuse cases;
- 42% of tier 2 to 4 offenders are drug misusers;
- The 'toxic trio' is involved in 75% of serious case reviews.



This was followed by a performance from Jude Theatre, a Community Interest Company that delivers issue-based workshops in schools, colleges, prisons and community venues.

The performance, simply called 'Louise', was in a style known as Forum Theatre. It aimed to create a discussion around the hard-hitting story, which featured scenes of domestic abuse. At the end of the play, there was a chance for everyone to discuss what they saw, try out possible solutions and even get up and intervene directly in the play.

Ian Mackay, Jude Theatre's Artistic Director, said: "The response to the performance was amazing and made the issues come alive in a way that can't always be traditionally achieved at these events. We have used this style of theatre a number of times to raise awareness of those with mental health conditions and learning difficulties as well as representing powerful issues such as alcoholism."

The performance provoked much debate, which fuelled lively table discussions in the next session. Staff were asked to consider some of the challenges, and to find solutions, which will be acted upon and then evaluated a future event.



Paul Levy said: "We started off with an idea for a staff development day based around the findings of our local audits on effective practice and safeguarding. It soon became clear that partners were crucial in helping us improve our own practice and recent Serious Case reviews have highlighted the presence of the toxic trio.

"Therefore, we decided to include partner agencies and our Peer Mentors to focus on these issues and were joined by eleven different agencies on the day. This helped create a buzz and some lively debate, with excellent feedback saying it was an emotive and thought provoking session, brought to life by the incredible Theatre performance. The day has helped us explore the main themes in more depth, what the barriers are, looking at best practice and setting out how we can work together to improve across our already positive partnership. We are looking at a follow up in the New Year to ensure this helps in our quest to constantly improve our practice.

Overall, a great day.”

Stoke on Trent College has been working closely with Jude Theatre over the past two years to engage with offender programmes across the West of the midlands, both in custody and in the community.

Mike Thornley, Project Coordinator, said: “This type of forum theatre production is powerful and hard hitting and I feel that support services and educational establishments can really benefit from this. The work represents a massive leap forward for the possibilities of what can be achieved, creating a greater awareness of real issues and breaking the cycle of offending behaviour.”



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